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April 13, 1942

Critics'

THEATRE REVIEWS

1942

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THEATRE REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

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NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
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NEW YORK TIMES
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NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

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"The Moon Is Down"

NEW YORK TIMES
April 8, 1942

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
"The Moon Is Down"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

EVEN if the Broadway theatre had not been moribund for most of the season, it would be easy to like and respect John Steinbeck's "The Moon Is Down," which was acted at the Martin Beck last evening. For Mr. Steinbeck is telling a calm and reasonable story about the immortality of freedom in terms of a tiny village—probably Norwegian—that every one can understand.

Since the war has yet to be won in the face of terrible and immediate odds, "The Moon Is Down" is not a play to please the propagandists of today. It is assured; it is not rousing and provocative and it does not remind us of the stupendous job that has to be done now and tomorrow. But Mr. Steinbeck apparently feels that a free people do not have to be manipulated by half-truths and tactful evasions. Without raising his voice or playing tricks on a plot, he has put down some of the fundamental truths about man's unconquerable will to live without a master. It is a remarkably convincing play because it is honest in its heart.

* * *

Since he is dealing with basic principles, Mr. Steinbeck has refrained from defining his town as Norwegian or the invaders as German. But let us assume that this is the story of the German invasion of a small Norwegian mining town after the ground had been prepared by a local traitor. Although the young German officers are flush with victory, their colonel is a mature man who has tried invasion before. If the people do not submit he knows that the rule of terror merely increases their resistance—that every hostage shot makes a hundred additional enemies, that the more ruthless his rule, the deeper the grave he digs for himself. Everything he does to strengthen his position increases the silent, penetrating resistance that weakens his power and breaks his nerves until he is the one who is surrendered. All this Mr. Steinbeck tells in terms of ordinary people who are face to face with realities.

* * *

Although "The Moon Is Down" lacks some of the gaudier excitements of the theatre, it has something better. It has the inner strength of sincerity. As a man of reason, Mr. Steinbeck believes what he is saying, for he also believes in the intelligence, tenacity and strength of an enlightened humanity. It will be a long time before the German commanders share the misgivings of Colonel Lanser, who is as much a man of reason as Mr. Steinbeck. At first glance that reasonable character in the invader's uniform seems to be the weakness of the play. But perhaps Mr. Steinbeck is right even in this characterization. For the play rings true in every detail, and arrives at an inevitable conclusion by an orderly, cumulative progress of concrete details.

* * *

Under Chester Erskin's direction it is acted that way. Otto Kruger's Colonel Lanser is lucid and manly without excess detail. Ralph Morgan's Mayor of the town is plain, earnest and selfless. As the benign village doctor, Whitford Kane, one of the best pipe-smokers on the stage, presides in cheerful humor. Among the invaders there are some contrasting qualities that complete the picture—the pedantic officiousness of Alan Hewitt's captain, the drawling patience of Russell Collins's major and the nervous hysteria of William Eythe's skeptical lieutenant. And among the villagers there are also some other tones—Joseph Sweeney's fussy servant, Jane Seymour's sullen cook, Maria Palmer's coldly revengeful widow of a murdered miner, Leona Powers's bustling, long-headed wife of the Mayor. As the local traitor, E. J. Ballantine is giving a skillful performance.

But the style of both the writing and the acting is unadorned and unimpassioned. Howard Bay's dark-toned settings repeat it. And the effect on the theatre is that of a great truth simply spoken. Mr. Steinbeck is writing out of a conviction that he can prove by the strength of his mind, heart and muscle.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
April 8, 1942

"Moon Is Down" Pits a Gentle Nazi Against A Simple Freeman

"The Moon Is Down," drama by John Steinbeck. Produced by Oscar Serlin at the Martin Beck Theatre, New York, April 7, 1942.

★ ★ ★—

By BURNS MANTLE

CREDIT John Steinbeck with good intentions and a vital theme in "The Moon Is Down" at the Martin Beck. He would prove that freemen never shall be slaves. Also that not all Nazis are blackhearted butchers. But, it seems to me, he misses something with both pleas.

His Nazis are several shades too gentle and his freemen much too simple to be convincing. And if that isn't a strange charge to make against John Steinbeck, realist, I wouldn't know what is.

It would be begging the question with similar indecision to say that "The Moon Is Down" is both a fine and a futile play. But, again, that is what it adds up to.

The case for the occupied countries is set up in a small mining town, possibly in Norway. The conquerors move in, the citizens submit with surly silence.

Gentle but Willing

The Col. Lanser in charge of the invading forces is Otto Kruger, as good an actor as ever, and twice as handsome. His chief staff officer is Major Hunter, in the person of Russell Collins, who never harmed a single soul and never could.

(And if you can imagine either Mr. Kruger or Mr. Collins representing invading Huns your imagination tops our own right at the start.)

The only tough number among the Nazis is Alan Hewitt, and he Mr. Steinbeck uses as a sort of subtle caricature of the rule-swallowing German precisionist.

The villagers are represented, with more reason, by Ralph Morgan and Whitford Kane. But here again is a simplicity and a homely courage without force or even definite firmness of character.

I would hesitate to contend that there are no ideals at heart hiding their philosophies under Nazi helmets and shouting their orders in disguised animal growlings.

But I find it difficult to believe that they could have so completely fooled the Hitlers and Himmlers and Goerings on their way up to the higher commands.

There is satisfaction, on the other hand, in Mr. Steinbeck's reasonable and occasionally moving picture of the free men of occupied Europe whose spirit is unconquerable.

Hidden Heroes

They are fighting a quiet but effective psychological war against their captors; aggravating them with a passive resistance that is devastating; pressing them with irritants, both physical and spiritual; threatening them with wholesale extermination in their sleep, as it were, and so disorganizing their morale that, come 1943, they will either be on the run or in their own asylums.

There is a heartening suggestion of that courage that creates martyrs in the little mayor's acceptance of his fate as a hostage in the last act, with Socrates' farewell to his executioners falling with gentle eloquence from his lips.

And there are good performances to sustain the frequently, to me, miscast cast. Mr. Kruger can't help being likable and un-Nazi; Mr. Collins is not to blame if Mr. Steinbeck wanted to use him to suggest that there are gentle Huns, too.

Mr. Morgan is true to the little leaders in a little people's world. William Eythe does well as a hysterical German boy in search of feminine company who gets himself stabbed with a lady's shears.

Maria Palmer, Leona Powers, Jane Seymour, Joseph Sweeney, E. J. Ballantine, the mystified Quisling—all good.

Complete settings by Howard Bay, and fluent direction by Chester Erskin.

NEW YORK SUN
April 8, 1942

Steinbeck's 'The Moon Is Down' Is Offered at the Martin Beck Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

IN "The Moon Is Down," which opened at the Martin Beck last evening, John Steinbeck has written a sensible, tolerant play on a theme which so engages our emotions that tolerance seems almost an impertinence. And since he is less dramatic than the feelings we carry into the theater, his play takes on the character of an understatement. It is philosophically interesting, and debatable; it only once or twice strikes fire. In the theater "The Moon Is Down" is disappointing.

He writes, as book reviewers must by now have made almost every one aware, of the invasion of an unnamed country by an undesignated foe. But this is little more than a device to suggest the universality of the issues involved. The country is Norway, the invaders are Nazi Germans. They are Nazis who come to a small mining town and take it without trouble. They are "even entirely polite about it. Their philosophic colonel, a man who "suffers from civilization" and is at heart skeptical of "leadership," is courteous to the town's mayor. His under-officers are, on the whole, agreeable fellows. The only real Nazi among them is subtly ridiculed by his comrades, who are easygoing and seeking only to be liked.

They are not liked, and that is Mr. Steinbeck's story. The people of the town distill the hate of free men against tyrants. They will not be quiet and they will not be good. They will not speak to the nice German soldiers or smile at them. They throw stones and afterward they fire bullets. And always they make the invader feel their hate. Hate, Mr. Steinbeck believes, is a corrosive thing. Under it the will of the conquerors disintegrates, as among such essentially decent conquerors it probably would. One of the Germans goes half-mad from loneliness and cries hysterically that "the flies conquer the flypaper." Subsequently he seeks love from a village girl and is killed by her. Finally, when the British have begun dropping dynamite by parachute the gentle colonel reluctantly orders the mayor shot as a hostage. But by then he knows, as the mayor knows, that "herd men win battles, but free men win wars"—win them because they go on fighting long after they are defeated.

It is an interesting story. Now and then, for moments, it is told with eloquence and in those moments it comes near to being what it might be. But it curiously lacks sustained conflict. By making his invaders more sinned against than sinning, Mr. Steinbeck has dissipated his drama. The drama needs two hostile forces face to face, there are pleasant, reasonable people on one side and on the other only disembodied orders from "the capital." Mr. Steinbeck proves himself tolerant to a fault, and his play suffers. So, I suspect, does his argument.

It is always comfortable to assume that Nazis are not really Nazis at heart. It is consoling to think they hate their work and have philosophic doubts as to the ultimate triumph of despotism. No doubt many of them have. But a lot of them do act like Nazis, and do not seem to mind being hated as much as they ought. So maybe we'd better start forgiving them and being sorry for them after we have licked them.

Otto Kruger gives an admirable, pliant performance as the Nazi colonel and Ralph Morgan is quietly resolute as the mayor, revealing heroism in gentle words and small actions. Whitford Kane is excellent as a doctor and there are many other good performances, notably by William Eythe, Jane Seymour, E. J. Ballantine, Maria Palmer, Leona Powers and Russell Collins. The acting, unfortunately, has more essential vitality than the play.

"The Moon Is Down"

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
April 8, 1942

'The Moon Is Down' Opens at Martin Beck

Otto Kruger and Ralph Morgan Play Leads in Drama by Steinbeck

By JOHN ANDERSON

As a literary seven-day wonder John Steinbeck's "The Moon Is Down" has already been swept to the top of the best seller list on a tidal wave of adjectives and since the novel seems to have had self-dramatizing attachments it was presented at the Martin Beck Theatre last night by Oscar Serlin. Let me state at once that I refrained from reading the book to leave the play free of all comparisons and let me add sadly that I found it deeply disappointing, heavy, stuffily unalive and somewhat pretentious.

One should, of course, be profoundly touched by this story of the quiet but heroic rebellion that goes on in a conquered town against the invaders. The spectacle of simple men and women, dying rather than yield an inch of their liberties should certainly present material of momentous drama and bring to the stage in affecting terms the human splendor of quiet, unflinching courage.

Yet somehow the heroic events of the play lose their emotional impact, and leave the stage to a sort of solemn argument between the Mayor of the little town and the invading officers. This failure is caused partly, I suspect, by the over-economy of the writing which frequently makes the dialogue sound arid, artificially clipped, and even inhuman.

Risky in Theatre

I know from Mr. Steinbeck's other books that this economy of speech is a superb literary device, of powerful concentration and emotional effect. But in a theatre it is risky for too many characters to talk as if they had just swallowed not only their tongues but Calvin Coolidge. When many people stand around hiding their feelings there is just a chance that they will suggest wax works as well as stoicism. Silence can be wonderfully eloquent, but only when emphasized by adequate sound.

But this is only part of the trouble, though it is probably heightened by what seems to me the larger defects of casting and direction. Whether the meagre dialogue is full enough for proper characterization is doubtful, but in the important parts the acting is pallid, vague, and monotonous.

Here, obviously, is the problem of the script for if the people are projected too vividly they lose the impression of human average which is Mr. Steinbeck's point, but as it is they pale into theatrical insignificance. Too often they seemed bloodless and spiritless, mere conversational stooges trying to suggest powers which they simply don't possess.

As the Mayor Ralph Morgan presents not much more than a stock figure of Foxy Grandpa valor, and as the opposing Colonel Otto Kruger so scrupulously avoids the harshness of the military, and the scientific brutality of his job that he seems unbelievable.

With almost nothing to go on in the way of dialogue Whitford Kane characterizes the old doctor with some warmth and vitality, and Alan Hewitt sketches a ferocious young captain with admirable force and clarity. He seemed the only one of the invaders armed with anything more dangerous than cream puffs. Even that excellent actor, Russell Collins, suffers the eclipse of Steinbeck static, in a part that must have more stage direction than dialogue.

Some of the others make the most of small opportunities. E. J. Ballantine creates a perfect portrait of a small-town Quisling and there are admirable performances by Leona Powers, Joseph Sweeney, Jane Seymour and Maria Palmer. Howard Bay's settings are vivid and accessible, and Mr. Erskin's direction seems less dramatic than processional as if designed appropriately for a novel that is, I'm afraid, lying in state.

'THE MOON IS DOWN'

A play in two acts by John Steinbeck; directed by Chester Erskin; designed by Howard Bay; presented at the Martin Beck Theater on April 7, 1942, by Oscar Serlin. The cast:

Dr. Winter	Whitford Kane
Joseph	Joseph Sweeney
Sergeant	Edwin Gordon
Captain Bentick	John D. Seymour
Mayor Orden	Ralph Morgan
Madame Orden	Leona Powers
Corporal	Charles Gordon
Colonel Lanser	Otto Kruger
George Corell	E. J. Ballantine
Annie	Jane Seymour
Soldier	Kermit Kegley
Major Hunter	Russell Collins
Lieutenant Prackle	Carl Gose
Captain Loft	Alan Hewitt
Lieutenant Tonder	William Eythe
Soldier	Victor Thorley
Molly Morden	Maria Palmer
Alex Morden	Philip Foster
Will Anders	George Keane
Tom Anders	Lyle Bettger

NEW YORK WOLRD-TELEGRAM
April 8, 1942

Steinbeck's The Moon Is Down Comes to the Stage

By JOHN MASON BROWN

DID some of the book reviewers when writing about The Moon Is Down say that John Steinbeck's novelette was so clearly intended to be a play that the dramatic critics should be dealing with it? Well, today it is my painful duty to toss Mr. Steinbeck's moving book right back to the literary reviewers.

I must admit that I surrender it to the library with regrets. My theatrical hopes for it were large. Heaven knows, the theater just now could stand a play as good as Mr. Steinbeck's novelette. I, too, had read The Moon Is Down and, mesmerized and moved by the skillful chaperonage of Mr. Steinbeck's writing, had been persuaded that if properly produced, it would have its lessons in dramatic technique to teach to most of our dramatists who have endeavored to deal with the war as a theme. But I was wrong.

Although Mr. Steinbeck's book as printed may even now be crying for production, it has never cried for the production it received last night. For so pale, pompous and tepid is the performance at the Martin Beck that a text which, when read, abounds page by page in its exciting proofs of skill, dwindles into a very minor affair indeed.

Paradoxically, a novel which in the library seems a better play than either Watch on the Rhine or There Shall Be No Night, emerges on the stage as something to make even Candle in the Wind appear noteworthy. It follows the dialogue of the original closely enough. Only a few sentences have been added here and there, and they are good ones. But without the all-important aid of Mr. Steinbeck's own novelistic stage directions, his Everyman of conquered countries, loses that extraordinary reality, and beauty it possesses for the reader. In Oscar Serlin's production it bears the same resemblance to its printed self that a heart which has stopped beating does to a heart which is still pumping.

* * *

Denied the fine setting of his prose, Mr. Steinbeck's dialogue, which was so alive in the book, keeps on sounding on the stage like the most wooden passages in the most dated of William Archer's Ibsen translations. With Chester Erskin ponderously doing Mr. Steinbeck's direction for him and an uninspired cast reverentially caressing his every syllable, the elliptical beauties of Mr. Steinbeck's writing soon proved stilted and chilling. His dialogue comes across as the kind of frosted speech in which everyone studiously says, "Is it not so?" instead of "Isn't it so?" Ultimately, as it is now being spoken, it turns out to be almost as lacking in emotion as it is in colloquialisms. My quarrel is not so much with the play still lurking in Mr. Steinbeck's novelette as it is with the production this play has been given by Oscar Serlin. As directed by Mr. Erskin scene after scene in The Moon Is Down sounds less like a drama being acted than it does like a novel being read aloud at sight.

There have been those who have maintained that Mr. Steinbeck's book is dangerous wishful thinking. As readers they have objected to its confident assumption that, though the herd men may win the battles, it is the free men who win the wars. They have felt that its picture of how the Nazis crack up due to their loneliness and need for love, when they are the hated conquerors of a small town which Mr. Steinbeck somewhat coyly refuses to identify as Norwegian, is ill-timed. They have insisted that such a point of view is apt to make us forget the huge effort which will have to be ours.

Although I, for one, did and do not feel this to be true of the book, I must admit I saw the point for the first time in the play. With the notable exception of Alan Hewitt, who creates a Nazi officer to a democrat's taste, Mr. Erskin has chosen a group of German soldiers who, with the aid of a bottle of whisky and a copy of Alice in Wonderland, could have stepped out of Journey's End. These Germans at the Martin Beck are too nice for comfort or belief.

* * *

Otto Kruger suffers from an identical overdose of niceness as Colonel Lanser. Although much better than might have been expected, Mr. Kruger is able to suggest only the remembering decencies of Mr. Steinbeck's Nazi colonel. Mr. Kruger resembles a nice English officer rather than one of Hitler's henchmen. The character he creates sympathetically is Dr. Jekyll without Mr. Hyde. He might have been disillusioned by the last war and doubt his Leader's infallibility, but he would never have ordered the Mayor to face a firing squad.

As the little Mayor who echoes the will of the people and speaks so bravely for democracy in Mr. Steinbeck's pages, Ralph Morgan is a singularly unfortunate choice. Made up to look like an ectoplasmic photograph of Edgar Allan Poe, Mr. Morgan sings and bleats until he turns a fine character into a valentine wired for sound. Although Leona Powers is admirable as Madame Orden and Jane Seymour has her amusing moments as the maid, the production suffers from Mr. Erskin's casting and direction.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
April 8, 1942

Invaders

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

OF THE much discussed and already violently controversial Steinbeck play, "The Moon is Down," it may be said at the outset that it is a shrewd and powerful melodrama, filled with striking emotional intensity and a crusading spirit. Its account of the silent, secret, implacable rising of a democratic people against a totalitarian invader is heartfelt, earnest and brightened by the author's profound faith in the unconquerable will of free men to maintain their freedom. To such an extent, it is an impressive drama, with an aura of true democratic heroism about it. Unfortunately, there is another side to the matter. "The Moon Is Down" has a surprising and disconcerting core of softness about it which weakens though it does not destroy its force.

* * *

It has been brought against Mr. Steinbeck's narrative by those who dislike the book that there is something essentially dangerous about the author's contention that the democratic side will win the second world war because its heart is pure. It strikes me that this is more than a little unfair to "The Moon Is Down." Although it calls no names it is obviously talking about the Nazi invasion of Norway, and the heroic, unconquerable stand of the

(Continued on page 320)

"The Moon Is Down"

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
April 8, 1942

The Nazis Conquer, but Cannot Win

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

AFTER considerable delay, the most eagerly awaited drama of the season arrived at the Martin Beck last night. From the enormous popularity that *The Moon Is Down* has already achieved in book form, most people know its story and theme—how a group of invaders that could only be Nazis manage (with the aid of a local fifth columnist) to take over a mining town in what could only be Norway; how the inhabitants remain icily aloof and utterly intractable, and by their behavior wear the conquerors down, even causing some of them to go to pieces; and how in the end the Mayor, like all his people, prefers death to any form of cooperation. For (so runs Steinbeck's message) you cannot conquer a free people.

Since the novel is scarcely more than a play between covers, the theater version follows it scene for scene, and almost word for word. On the stage, however, it is in most respects less effective. In the reading, the drama was enkindled by the rhetoric; in the theater, the rhetoric—when spoken aloud—often seems stilted and formal. The lack of any sustained action did not greatly harm the book, but on the stage *The Moon Is Down* does not seem dynamic enough. Though it has good scenes, there are too few of them.

More surprisingly, the characters seemed more convincing in the book, where they were only sketched, than they do on the stage, where they are portrayed in flesh and blood. The blame for this, however, is almost certainly that of the production. Mr. Erskin's direction is heavy-handed and too respectful, while one of the major roles is acted unsuitably and the other downright badly. As the cultivated Nazi Colonel, Otto Kruger has ease and address, but lacks the necessary iron force, and suggests an Englishman much more than a German. As the Mayor, Ralph Morgan is hopelessly wrong, a soft, kindly, slightly doddering old gentleman who never even stands on the threshold of the part. There are better performances in smaller roles, by Russell Collins, E. J. Ballantine and others; but there are no outstanding ones.

* * *

For me, the exact merits of the play mean less—since it is propaganda written by a very famous writer—than its slant. This slant, which has already provoked considerable controversy over the book, will provoke it also, I think, over the play. And since a great number of people will see the play, this is of real importance.

Steinbeck's message—that you cannot conquer a free people—is a lofty one and, taking the long view, a true one. But in terms of the present moment, and in the face of how Steinbeck chooses to illustrate his credo, it seems to me misguided and even a little dangerous. Doubtless there is something heartening about it, and that is good; but there is much more that is merely consoling, and that is extremely bad. Right now we all of us crave the reassurance that *The Moon Is Down* provides; but is it what a nation that is still to complacent, too unrealistically sanguine, ought to have? An act of faith, if it ignores harsh facts, can become an act of folly. What we need to be told right now is not, as Steinbeck comes close to saying, that we cannot lose the present struggle, but that we have got to work like hell to win it.

Furthermore, I don't think that Steinbeck illustrates his thesis convincingly. His Nazis behave as no Nazi conquerors have been known to behave. It is all very well to show them as human beings rather than mere monsters; but he shows them as too much the kind of people who have known our way of life; he doesn't really take into account the force of the fanatical education to which they have been exposed. And though the Nazis, with their unnatural discipline, would swiftly crack up in the face of defeat, there are simply no grounds for believing that they go rapidly to pieces in the face of victory. Without knowing it, Steinbeck has sentimentalized his conquerors. And at the same time I think he has let his Norwegians wear their chains too lightly; his play rightly emphasizes their heroism, but it does not make us feel their sufferings.

Of Steinbeck's sincerity, of his good intentions, there can be no question. But his psychology seems to me oversimplified to the point of falseness; and his credo is entirely too comforting. He is making rhetoric, not a spur to action, but a substitute for it. And for action, today, there is no substitute.

NEW YORK POST
April 8, 1942

Steinbeck's "The Moon Is Down" at the Martin Beck Theatre

By WILELLA WALDORF

JOHN STEINBECK'S short novel, "The Moon Is Down," is already a best-seller, and his dramatic version of the book, produced by Oscar Serlin last night at the Martin Beck Theatre, is naturally a theatrical event of unusual interest.

Preferring to gain our first impression in the theatre rather than in the library, we have been saving the book to read after the opening of the play, and it must be admitted that despite Mr. Steinbeck's brave and heartening thesis that free men cannot be conquered, "The Moon Is Down" is only intermittently effective on the stage.

An Invaded Country

Although the locale is given merely as "a small mining town," and no nationalities are specified, it is generally considered that Mr. Steinbeck had Norway in mind as the invaded country. All but one of the eight scenes take place in the drawing-room of the Mayor's home, commandeered as his headquarters by the colonel in charge of the Nazi detachment sent in to see that the mines go on working.

Much of the action in the play, therefore, of necessity takes place offstage and is merely reflected in the gradual disintegration of the staff officers involved, and their relations with the Mayor and his household.

The slow awakening of the people of the town to the fact that they have been invaded, and their refusal to receive the conquering army as friends and heroes, puts such a strain on the Germans that it is possible to become almost sorry for the poor fellows as time goes on and the cracking up process sets in.

The Nazis Crack-Up

Not having had the opportunity of watching a Nazi army at work we are in no position to say that Mr. Steinbeck's conception of the boys from Berlin may not be completely authentic. We can say, however, that much of "The Moon Is Down" did not ring true to our eyes and ears as it was performed last night at the Martin Beck.

The Colonel, an older and wiser man, it was possible to accept as an enlightened and intelligent officer whose experience in the last war had taught him something about human nature, but the young lieutenant who goes to pieces and speaks the now celebrated line about flies conquering the fly-paper seemed merely a not very impressive stage replica of all the other young lieutenants who have gone to pieces in war plays of the past.

It is a hopeful picture that Mr. Steinbeck paints of a group of little people defying an invader, and the final scene in which the mild but sturdy little Mayor goes to his death is the most effective of the evening, especially when he tells the colonel that brave men may win battles but that free men win wars.

Much of the time, however, "The Moon Is Down" is repetitious and somewhat aimless in its dramatic construction, and occasionally we were not quite certain precisely where the author was trying to take us.

The Performance

The performance, directed by Chester Erskin, is leisurely and almost never overly exciting, even in some of its more intense moments. Ralph Morgan as the Mayor struck us as a bit too bewildered and benevolently ineffective even after he was supposed to have made up his mind to resist. The uniformed contingent under Otto Kruger, however, clumped and clicked heels with the proper snap. Some of the minor characters seemed distressingly like stock figures earnestly working away supplying comic relief, local color, etc.

"The Moon Is Down" has its moments, and it is a reassuring play to see in times like these. But it is not the stirring drama we had hoped for from Mr. Steinbeck's pen.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
(Continued from page 319)

Norwegians against their oppressors has proved too noble a resistance to warrant any complaint that a dramatization of it is no more than a smug cry that we are the good people of the world. What Mr. Steinbeck is contemplating essentially is the terrible heritage of hate that the Nazis are building up throughout Europe and which will savagely overwhelm them when they are beaten in battle.

* * *

To that extent what he has to say is impressive and thoroughly sound. The silent revolt of the Norwegians is surely fine enough to warrant an exultant treatment. Where I think Mr. Steinbeck has gone wrong has been in his commendable but far too determined effort to be fair to his Nazis. He wants to show them as decent, average men, with the proper human instincts, who are as much the tragic victims of the creed of their leaders as are the oppressed men and women of the conquered lands. The result is that five of the Nazis are the most charming fellows imaginable and only two of them, including the local fifth columnist, are a sort of minor monsters. It is my guess that his proportion might well have been reversed, for, as it is, "The Moon Is Down" feeds us on the false hope that the Germans are not the strong, determined, terribly powerful people that they are.

* * *

The essential kindliness of most of the Nazis, together with a certain excessive sweetness on the part of the martyred mayor of the invaded village, at times gives a certain curious whimsicality to the play that is utterly out of place. Obviously the Nazis have a ruthless code that is administered by ruthless men, and any suggestion of essential boyish ingenuousness about them is to be questioned not as bad propaganda but as unsound drama and a wild lapse from the truth. For all that essential softness, however, "The Moon Is Down" has so much downright theatrical shrewdness, so much sincerity of writing and emotion and so honest a belief in the invincible spirit of men of good will that it takes on a quality of dramatic effectiveness on the stage that is inescapable.

* * *

Just as there is a bit too much charm in the writing, so, I suspect, is there too much of it in the acting. Ralph Morgan, for example, concentrates far too heavily on the sweetness of spirit of the Mayor to be properly effective. As the invader colonel, a decent man unhappy in his savage task of oppression, Otto Kruger is forthright and effective, although perhaps lacking in a touch of the Nazi steel. Russell Collins, Carl Gose and William Eythe are properly sympathetic as well meaning and unhappy invaders, and Alan Hewitt and E. J. Ballantine seem somehow more credible as disagreeable ones. Miss Maria Palmer is effective as a young widow who avenges her husband's death, but Joseph Sweeney, that fine actor, is wasted in the part of a loyal serving man. Whitford Kane is also sympathetic and gentle as the village doctor. "The Moon Is Down" is a striking play that still is something of a disappointment.

"Nathan the Wise"

(Editor's note: "Nathan the Wise," opened March 11th at an experimental theatre, the Studio Theatre on 12th Street, and made its Broadway debut April 3rd at the Belasco Theatre. CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS presents the two re-reviews appearing upon the play's Broadway opening and the earlier reviews of the other critics.)

NEW YORK TIMES
April 4, 1942

Ferdinand Bruckner's Version Of Lessing's 'Nathan the Wise' Moves Uptown

By BROOKS ATKINSON

AS A REWARD for virtue Ferdinand Bruckner's version of Lessing's "Nathan the Wise" has been brought uptown from Twelfth Street to the Belasco, where it had another opening last evening. Since the journey to Broadway gives this department a second opportunity of seeing a celebrated play about religious and racial tolerance, it is again certified in these columns as the first work of real intelligence to appear in our neighborhood for a long time.

To students of Lessing, Bruckner's truncated adaptation is not satisfactory, but Lessing's original drama, written late in the eighteenth century, is too long, too intricate and in some literary ways too ingenuous for modern taste. In the circumstances, we may as well regard the current "Nathan the Wise" as stuffy in the romantic scenes and stilted in prose style, but as exalting in the three or four episodes when it gets down to the main theme of tolerance. For it was conceived in wisdom by a man of humane and liberal instincts.

* * *

Lessing was a protean writer who communicated his central thought in more than one medium. As a critic he was the enemy of rules that cramped or thwarted creation. Applying the same wholesome spirit of liberation to religion, he regarded creeds as of trifling importance in comparison with a simple love of God. To communicate his thought in the theatre he had to invent a didactic plot about a Knight Templar in the third crusade who fell in love with the daughter of a Jew and appealed to the Sultan Saladin to decide the religious and racial complications involved. This plot brings the Mohammedan, Jewish and Christian laws into conflict in the last scene.

As a drama, "Nathan the Wise," in Bruckner's version, plods through some love scenes that are parsimoniously written and dutifully acted in the current performance. But when Nathan, whose religion is natural and spontaneous, breaks down the intolerance of the Knight Templar by expressions of simple friendliness, when he illustrates the foolishness of religious antagonisms in an amusing and enlightened parable before the Sultan and when he stands trial in the last scene, Lessing's fable has three moments of triumphant splendor. "Nathan the Wise" deserves a patient listening for the sake of three scenes of spiritual illumination when Lessing is speaking for the ages. No wonder the Nazis had to burn his play in Unter den Linden as soon as they came to power. But no one can be in power long enough to burn all the copies of this drama throughout the world.

* * *

All the actors who first appeared in this production at the New School for Social Research have come uptown and are repeating the good performances they gave originally. As Nathan, Herbert Berghof may be a little more restless and diffuse with his gestures than he was at first, but the sweetness and gentleness of his acting are affecting in the crucial scenes. Alfred Ryder's tense, driven portrait of the Templar has improved and is his best work to date. Gregory Morton's scholarly, poised acting of the literal-minded Patriarch, Bram Nossen's earnest and compassionate Sultan and Ross Matthew's amusing sketch of the lay brother are well-contrasted performances. As Nathan's daughter, Olive Deering is giving a beguiling performance that might be more deeply passionate and less ill-tempered in the scenes of anxiety. Bettina Cerf plays the part of the daughter's companion with genuine feeling.

In all conscience, the pace of the group performance might be brisker and the attack more pithy and compact. For "Nathan the Wise" has something of vital sagacity to contribute to modern thinking.

'NATHAN THE WISE'

NATHAN THE WISE, play in two acts and eight scenes, by Ferdinand Bruckner, adapted from the play by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. Staged by James Light; scenery by Cleon Throckmorton; costumes by Rose Bogdanoff; produced by Erwin Piscator. At the Belasco Theatre.

Nathan	Herbert Berghof
Daja	Bettina Cerf
Rahel	Olive Deering
A Knight Templar	Alfred Ryder
A Lay Brother	Ross Matthew
The Patriarch	Gregory Morton
The Sultan Saladin	Bram Nossen
Monks	Liebert Wallerstein, Jack Bittner

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
March 12, 1942

'Nathan the Wise' Staged in English

Lessing's Polemical Drama Has Special Timeliness in View of Nazi Doings

By JOHN ANDERSON

ANY attack on racial and religious intolerance is bound to find special welcome in the ears at the moment, and there is, of course, an extra irony when such a plea for tolerance is in a German classic, written in 1779—a German classic burned by the Nazis as they set fire to Europe. It was this fact rather than the play itself which gave point to the production last night in the Studio Theatre at the New School for Social Research of Lessing's "Nathan the Wise," in what the program describes as a "free adaptation" by Ferdinand Bruckner. It was presented by Erwin Piscator under the direction of James Light.

Bruckner has altered some of the relationships of the people in the play and stripped it down to its essentials—the three-cornered religious war represented by the Sultan Saladin, an impetuous Knight Templar on a Crusade to Jerusalem, and Nathan, the Jew, the embodiment of wisdom and common sense, or realism and tolerance.

He has left it pretty much a rather windy round-table discussion among these three, studded with long speeches, in which an actor can take a good stance and spout. If the words do not command attention by their eloquence, they capture the heart in their simple honesty and anguishing importance.

By far the most potent and celebrated passage in the play is the scene wherein the Sultan asks the wise old Jew which of the religions he thinks is the true one, and Nathan tells him the Parable of the Rings, a parable, if I'm not mistaken, borrowed by Lessing for the occasion and right to the point.

Father's Solution

This parable has it that there was once a magic ring which made its owner most beloved of God and man. It was passed down from generation to generation from father to most beloved son until it came to a man who loved his three sons equally, and promised each of them he would inherit the ring. On his deathbed the father could reach no decision, and so sent for a jeweler to make two copies, and the copies were so exact that no one could tell the original from the duplicates.

In the quarrel that ensued, the judge decided that since the real ring was bound to make one of them most beloved of God and man, it would show its qualities, and since it didn't, none of the three could be the original. None could prove his ownership without making himself beloved of all.

As a parable for religious bigots, it is a perfect case, but like the rest of the play, its appeal is less dramatic than rational. For "Nathan the Wise" never takes on the tension and pressure of the theatre; it is rather an exercise in polemics, at which all men of good will may agree that as Nathan puts it, God alone has the right to ultimate truth; it is enough for men to yearn for it.

Simply Directed

With such static material to direct, Mr. Light has directed it simply, without doing much to intensify the scene or avoid stage emptiness. Herbert Berghof presents a remarkable and persuasive performance of old Nathan, genial, warm, compassionate and heartily sensible.

It is bound to be, I suppose, less a rounded portrait than a sort of talking likeness, but even so, Mr. Berghof manages to expand the sketchy description with a fine sense of humanity and urgent meaning. There are also good performances, within the same rather dramatically arid restrictions, by Olive Deering, as the daughter, Alfred Ryder as the Knight Templar, and Bram Nossen as the Sultan.

So even if it is not a very good play, it bears good tidings and simple truth, and the hope that the world may some day find that all the magic rings are real. It is something to nourish that hope.

"Nathan the Wise"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
April 4, 1942

'Nathan the Wise' Has A Good Friday Debut

"Nathan the Wise," drama adapted by Ferdinand Bruckner from the original of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. Produced by Erwin Piscator at the Belasco Theatre, New York, April 3, 1942.

★ ★+

By BURNS MANTLE

THE transfer of the Studio Theatre production of Lessing's "Nathan the Wise" from an experimental theatre in 12th Street to the Belasco Theatre in 44th Street, where it made a Good Friday debut last night, offers opportunity for some pretty vivid emotional contrasts in the Broadway sector.

Last night, for example, we came from the theatre again definitely impressed by the persuasiveness of this argument for racial and religious tolerance, only to run smack into screaming headlines proclaiming the loss of 700 United States service men in the sinking of three American ships.

In God's world, preached Nathan, the wise and gentle Jew, there should be no war, or killings, or hatreds. Humility, forbearance, tolerance and love should be the ruling affirmations of men.

That was in the days of the Third Crusade, when Jews and Moslems and Christian Knights Templar from Germany were killing each other for the privilege of worshipping God, each after his own fashion.

In the cause of our respective freedoms we are still at it.

Changed Setting

In Twelfth Street Erwin Piscator's production offered a pilgrimage for those who might be of a mind to seek peace for their souls rather than stimulation for their war spirit.

Moved into the heart of the competitive theatre it takes on values that are somewhat different. It is still effective drama, staged with skill and acted with frequent touches of moving eloquence.

But now it becomes just another theatre attraction for the crowd and loses something of its appeal as a pilgrimage for the few.

The ardent love story of the Christian Knight and Nathan's daughter, carried by the wisdom of Jew and Moslem through their respective misunderstanding hates to a triumph, despite the opposition of a misguided Patriarch of the church, is again eloquently read by the Studio Theatre cast.

Herbert Berghof's recital of the parable of the rings and his story of his adoption of his Christian daughter are moving drama, for all he continues, actor-like, to suggest a shade too great over-deliberation and self-consciousness.

Alfred Ryder is a truly impassioned and stubborn knight, Olive Deering a sincere and appealing Rahel. Bram Nossen, Bettina Cerf, Ross Matthew and Gregory Morton add their excellent bits to a satisfying whole.

Last night's audience, representing a theatre party organized by an interested group, was happily pleased and enthusiastic.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
March 12, 1942

Men of Good Will

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

IT IS quite a thorough surgical job that has been performed on Lessing's celebrated eighteenth century plea for tolerance, "Nathan the Wise," and the operation is remarkably successful. Subplots have been lopped off, scenes have been omitted and an ending which seemed bent on turning all the characters of the play into relatives has been done away with. "Nathan the Wise," for all its editing, remains a garrulous and undramatic work, with the nobility of its spirit atoning for its essential tediousness, but, as competently presented by the Studio Theater of the New School in its Twelfth Street Playhouse it is unexpectedly interesting in its rather literary fashion.

There is only one scene in which the Lessing play really comes into dramatic life, and that is in an almost purely philosophical way. The living episode is the one wherein the wise and tolerant Jew meets that unusually attractive figure of history and legend, the Sultan Saladin, and explains to him his ideas of truth, justice and mutual understanding. For the rest of the time the message that "Not the truth that a man knows or thinks he knows, but rather the honest effort he makes to reach that truth, is what determines the worth of a man" is attractively and honestly presented, but its terms are lofty and elocutionary rather than effectively theatrical.

• • •

It must certainly be said that the representatives of Judaism and Islam come out of the Lessing argument far more handsomely than the men who stand for Christianity. There is real nobility in the characterizations of Nathan and Saladin, but the Knight Templar, though a well-meaning fellow, is rather a dolt and the Christian Patriarch is little more than a symbol of intolerance. It is, of course, the point Lessing makes that when men of good will come together matters of race and creed are of small importance and that religion can be evil rather than beautiful when it tends to emphasize dogma at the expense of that natural good will. There is something so fine about this message coming out of Germany, even though it is the Germany of 1779, that the play containing it must seem valiant to us.

• • •

Considerable credit goes to Ferdinand Bruckner, who made this free adaptation of the play, for the wholesale manner in which he did away with the work's deadwood. In the title role, Herbert Berghof, while a little too mannered at moments, gives Nathan the proper quality of intellectual honesty. Bram Nossen lacks something of the warmth that might well have gone into the part of Saladin, but he plays with proper directness. Alfred Ryder is forthright as the Knight Templar and Ross Matthew is effective as a conscientious Jew brother who seems to have wandered in from one of the missing subplots. Miss Olive Deering brings a sincere and attractive simplicity to the character of Nathan's adopted Christian daughter. H. A. Condell's settings and costumes, Hans Sondheimer's lighting, and James Light's direction are of help. "Nathan the Wise" is a creditable job for the Studio Theater.

NEW YORK SUN
March 12, 1942

Lessing's 'Nathan the Wise' Opens at the Studio Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

GOTTHOLD EPHRAIM LESSING wrote "Nathan the Wise" in 1779 and used a story laid in Jerusalem at the time of the third crusade to dramatize his plea for racial and religious tolerance. "Nathan the Wise" was burned in Berlin in 1933 as Germany flung herself back into the dark ages. Unfortunately, Herr Lessing's theme is always timely. His campaign of enlightenment makes dismally little progress.

"Nathan the Wise" was revived last evening by the Studio Theater in a very moderately eloquent English version written by Ferdinand Bruckner. Mr. Bruckner has simplified the romantic ramifications of the original story, seeking to bring Lessing's theme into clearer focus. It is a short play, now. Its drama lies in its clash of ideas rather than in the romantic misadventures of Rahel, the Christian girl adopted by the Jew, and the Knight Templar who rescued her from fire and fell in love with her. Bruckner is polite to the love story, with the politeness of a man who touches his hat in passing.

Theatrically, this version is not compelling. Dialogues pass given points while characters remain more or less stationary, and all the emphasis is on the ideas. But the ideas are in themselves vital and, under the frequent clumsiness of the English phrasing, they are expressed with nobility. The future of the boy and girl is made secondary to the Sultan's search for truth; to Nathan's parable of the three rings, left by a loving father to his three sons—rings so identical that the "true" ring could not be determined. The rings symbolize the Jewish, Christian and Moslem faiths. Action is sacrificed to let Lessing's plea for tolerance, forbearance and understanding between man and man take the center of the stage.

Such ideas in these days carry their own drama. The Studio Theater has heightened this drama by its production, which is simple and sincere and for the most part effective. Herbert Berghof plays the role of Nathan with a quiet wisdom of his own, letting the author's argument unfold through his acting as much as through the words. Bram Nossen is excellent as the intellectually curious Sultan Saladin, and Alfred Ryder is persuasive as the young Crusader who found an uncontemplated victory in the Holy Land. Olive Deering is touching as Rahel, and Ross Matthew plays the part of a philosophic Christian with, often, amusing understatement.

"Nathan the Wise" is, from the present look of things, one of those plays which will always be worth doing. It seems, indeed, to grow more timely by the minute.

"Nathan the Wise"

NEW YORK POST
March 12, 1942

Lessing's "Nathan the Wise" Acted at the Studio Theatre

By WILELLA WALDORF

THE Studio Theatre down in West Twelfth Street, not being subject to the commercial restrictions of Broadway, can afford to exhume dramas out of the past as an exercise in stagecraft without worrying unduly over their chances of becoming smash hits.

Last night brought what is announced as the first professional English production of Lessing's drama, "Nathan the Wise," to town, in "a free adaptation in English verse" by Ferdinand Bruckner. Lessing wrote the play in 1779, and it is laid in Jerusalem during the Third Crusade, but what it has to say is as true and timely as ever. The world changes very little as wars come and go. Lessing was pleading for religious and racial tolerance, and the problem is still with us, now, perhaps, more than ever.

The current version is presented in two acts of four scenes each, and what plot it has centers about the young foster daughter of a rich Jewish merchant in Jerusalem, who is saved from a burning building by a pious and impetuous Knight Templar from Germany, taken prisoner in the last fight between the Moslems and the Crusaders and spared from death by the Sultan Saladin. The girl, it develops, is actually a Christian, adopted in childhood by Nathan, the Jew, and brought up to believe that she, too, is Jewish, an offense punishable by death, according to Christian justice.

A Plea for Tolerance

The young Knight, horrified at Nathan's sin, consults the wily Patriarch of his church as to the proper course to pursue, and finally takes the case to Saladin himself, a Moslem sitting in judgment on Christian and Jew. When the adopted daughter, brought up to respect all three faiths, clings to her foster father and refuses to admit that he has done anything wrong, the Knight casts off the bonds of prejudice and the curtain falls on a tableau depicting an enlightened tolerance on the part of the zealous adherents of three different religions. The picture is a pretty one, but unfortunately represents only an artist's dream.

Mr. Bruckner's "free adaptation," and Mr. Light's production at the Studio Theatre is most effective in the scenes of Nathan's audience with the enlightened Sultan Saladin, the Knight's consultation with the Christian Patriarch, and the final trial. "Nathan the Wise," at least as it comes over in this version, is a static drama that begins slowly and owes what interest it finally achieves to the declamatory utterances of Nathan himself, the Sultan, the Knight and the Patriarch, all of whom make speeches pointing up the author's thesis that there are various roads to Heaven, one as good as another, and that as long as we are all human beings living on the same planet, we may as well try to get along with one another in reasonable and mutually trusting fashion.

A Professional Cast

Herbert Berghof, a Viennese actor who speaks with something of an accent, seemed uncertain in the early scenes but gave a good account of himself later on, when called upon to enunciate some of Lessing's long but often powerful pleading. Bram Nossen made an impressive Sultan, Gregory Morton exhibited dignity and guile as the Patriarch, and Ross Matthew had his moments as a humble Lay Brother who was brighter than he seemed. Alfred Ryder brought youthful impetuosity to the role of the Knight, while the ladies of the company, Olive Deering and Bettina Cerf, struggled with the less inspired sections of the text and seemed to encounter a bit of trouble fitting themselves into the medieval background, though both were attractive in appearance and earnest in speech, with perhaps a few too many gestures here and there.

"Nathan the Wise" will run through March 22, except for the evening of March 16 when the theatre is dark. Prices at the Studio Theatre are low, ranging from 55c to $1.10, and tickets are available to members only. It is, however, quite easy to become a member if you are interested in the theatre and enjoy seeing plays that would never by any remote chance find their way into the Broadway district under its present set-up.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
March 12, 1942

New School Players Offer Lessing's Nathan the Wise

By JOHN MASON BROWN

IT IS not surprising that Nathan the Wise should have been burned by the Nazis on Unter den Linden in May, 1933. Neither Hitler nor his henchmen could be expected to tolerate Lessing's dramatic protest against intolerance and his plea for the equality of races and religions. The Kampf that the Fuehrer is still willing to call Mein has nothing to do with the Kampf that was Lessing's as far back as 1779.

Reread this old classic of the German stage even in such an execrable translation as R. Dillon Boylan's version, filled as it is with "'Tis I's," "Anons," or such opera libretto infelicities as "I see an eye in tears," and you cannot fail to respond to the greatness of the mind and spirit which animates the play. Or sit before it down at the New School, where, as surprisingly abbreviated by Ferdinand Bruckner in a free adaptation in English verse that is only a trifle superior to old Mr. Boylan's, it is being given a decidedly Studio Theater production, and still the blaze of Lessing's intellect and heart is such that no Nazi could hope to survive it.

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Mr. Bruckner has taken his liberties with the original, as one might say with justice of a doctor who had cut off the arms and legs of a patient. Only a starved shadow of the drama's overlong and technically outmoded self is now being acted by Mr. Piscator's players down on 12th Street. The cuts made in this antique parable, where Christian, Jew and Mussulman serve Lessing as the conflicting races and religions in his plea for tolerance, are harmful at the outset. Then it is that Mr. Bruckner denies the plot its multiplicity and suspense, that he exiles the Sultan to the wings and eliminates entirely such helpful characters as Hafi and the Sultan's chess-playing sister.

But the fable of the Christian girl brought up by Nathan, the wise Jew in the Jerusalem of the Crusades, without knowing she is a Christian, and courted by a Knight Templar in the Sultan's land, still has its fine and welcome points to make in freedom's defense. It may be static, but it is interesting and often eloquent. Mr. Bruckner has aided Lessing by depriving his drama of the ridiculous Gilbert and Sullivan lost-baby complications which, for contemporary audiences, make the original ending laughable. One only wishes Mr. Bruckner's verse were better and that he had condensed individual speeches as fearlessly as he has pruned the plot. Or, better still, that it could have been Stefan Zweig who had prepared for Nathan the Wise a modern equivalent as admirable as was his simplified version of Ben Jonson's Volpone.

* * *

The production down at the New School is more makeshift than truly satisfactory. It is cramped on the little stage and could, with the same economy of means, have been much better set and lighted than it is. Bram Nossen is an impressive Sultan, both visually and vocally. Ross Matthew is amusing as the Lay Brother. And, given the benefit of more helpful direction than James Light has provided, Herbert Berghof's Nathan might possibly achieve throughout the warm effects it suggests at moments. The rest of the cast can most accurately be described as having been present.

Even so, we are grateful to these actors and to the Studio Theater for what they have permitted us to see of Nathan the Wise. The play's magnitude of spirit and mind is still present, changed though dramatic tastes and forms may have become. One understands why Nathan the Wise is a classic. The world's tragedy is that it has not caught up with Lessing.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
March 12, 1942

A German Pleads for the Jews

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

IT IS little wonder that this play, which a wise Christian wrote 150 years ago about a wise Jew, should have been thrown on the flames when the Nazis came to power. For *Nathan the Wise* continues to be one of the most nobly passionate of pleas for racial and religious tolerance. But it also continues to be a not very good play.

For though it contains plenty of characters an ample plot, it is so nakedly didactic, so uninterruptedly symbolic, that it never flares up into real drama. Its tale of an enlightened medieval Jew who converts both a Christian Templar and a Mohammedan Sultan to his own gospel of tolerance, is an undisguised sermon. Its best moments arise out of kindling pleas and ringing speeches. Its most famous scene centers around the straightforward telling of a parable.

For just that reason Ferdinand Bruckner, in adapting the play, has been wise to scamp the old-fashioned plot, throw out several of the characters, and completely ignore the genealogical mixup at the end which vies favorably with the best that even Gilbert and Sullivan could do in that line. By sticking to Lessing's impassioned message, the present version emphasizes not only what is most timely about *Nathan the Wise*, but also what is most telling. A good plea, after all, is better than a bad play.

The present text, which is in verse, is often too stiff and declamatory, but it is always clear and sometimes vigorous. The production, too, has a certain stiffness about it, but the fault is chiefly Lessing's. For there has been a definite and, on the whole, successful effort to animate the work, however broadly. In the central role Herbert Berghof has his moments of humor and humanity as well as his full measure of sententiousness and wisdom. As Nathan's adopted daughter, Olive Deering plays her part with passion; as the Templar, Alfred Ryder is suitably, if not very skilfully, hot-headed. And Gregory Morton infuses considerable rhetorical vigor into the role of the Christian Patriarch.